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A Rebirth of Images? Theme and Motif in Jeremiah and Ezekiel

Paul M. Joyce

The books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel share a great deal. Neither mentions the other, overtly or obliquely,¹ but that they are connected one way or another seems clear and the question of their literary relations has generated a large body of scholarly literature.²

The Literary Relations of Jeremiah and Ezekiel

To illustrate the general phenomenon of shared images in the two books I begin by briskly citing five motifs. First, consumption of divine words: In Jer 1:9 we read “Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, ‘Now I have put my words in your mouth’” and in Jer 15:16 “Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart.” Comparably, in Ezek 3:1–3 we find “He said to me, ‘O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.’ So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. He said to me, ‘Mortal, eat this scroll that I

¹ See the valuable discussion of D. Rom-Shiloni: “Ezekiel and Jeremiah: What Might Stand Behind the Silence?”, *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 1 (2012), 203–230. Still of interest is the much earlier and more popular brief reflection of G. W. Anderson, *Prophetic Contemporaries: A Study of Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (London: Epworth, 1967).

² For example, M. Burrows, *The Literary Relations of Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society Press, 1925); J. W. Miller, *Das Verhältnis Jeremias und Hesekiels sprachlich und theologisch untersucht mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Prosareden Jeremias* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1955); D. Vieweger, *Die literarischen Beziehungen zwischen den Büchern Jeremia und Ezechiel* (BEATAJ 26; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993). On the need for methodological caution, see P. M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* LHBOTS 482 (New York and London: T&T Clark / Continuum, 2007), 33–41.

give you and fill your stomach with it.’ Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey.”

Second, the deity fortifying the prophet against resistance: In Jer 1:18–19 we read “‘And I for my part have made you today a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you,’ says the LORD, ‘to deliver you’”, and in Ezek 3:8–9 “See, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their foreheads. Like the hardest stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not fear them or be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house”. Third, watchmen or sentinels: In Jer 6:17 we read “Also I raised up sentinels for you: ‘Give heed to the sound of the trumpet!’ But they said, ‘We will not give heed’”, and in Ezek 3:17–21 “Mortal, I have made you a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me”. Fourth, traditional paragons of virtue: In Jer 15:1 we read “Then the LORD said to me: ‘Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight, and let them go!’”, and in Ezek 14:14, 20, “‘Even if Noah, Daniel, and Job, these three, were in it, they would save only their own lives by their righteousness’, says the Lord God”. Fifth and finally, bad and good shepherds: In Jer 23 we read “‘Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!’ says the LORD”, and in Ezek 34:2 “Mortal, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel: prophesy, and say to them—to the shepherds: Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?’” As for good shepherds, in Jer 3:15 we find “I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding”, and in Ezek 34:11 “For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out” and in verse 23, “I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd”.³

³ Alongside such cases we may note also the non-verbal communication embodied in the numerous “sign-acts” that are to be found in the two books, which share both similarities and differences in this regard. Cf. K. G. Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts: Rhetorical*

These and other cases⁴ inevitably raise the question of how to explain such similarities between Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Are we speaking of prophets here or of texts? And when we speak of prophets, do we mean historical figures or literary characters in texts? All of these: as readers we encounter texts in the first instance, and within them appear characters, who in my view bear at least some relation to historical figures. It is evident that people had a role in generating these texts and it is legitimate to speculate on the relationship between those individuals (and perhaps groups) and the named prophetic characters who appear in the books.⁵

As for the images we have briskly reviewed, some of them may of course derive from common cultural stock predating both books, such as the metaphor of shepherds for leaders (widely evidenced in the ancient world), and so it is hard to prove direct connection between Jeremiah and Ezekiel.⁶ In other cases, however, images are rarer in the extant literature and a closer link of some kind seems plausible, reflecting more specific tradition. The motif of the consumption of divine words (Jer 1:9; 15:16; Ezek 3:1–3) may provide an example. Unless one regards the presented settings of the two books as entirely fictional, it would appear that Jeremiah was active as a prophet for a significant period of time before Ezekiel,⁷ and so it is tempting to assume that Ezekiel is often the borrower in such cases. It seems not unlikely that Ezekiel inherited the theme of the consumption of the words of God from Jeremiah,⁸ and then

Nonverbal Communication (JSOT Supplement Series, 283; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

⁴ Holladay attempts to assemble an exhaustive list: W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 81–84.

⁵ Cf. J. C. de Moor, ed., *The Elusive Prophet: The Prophet as a Historical Person, Literary Character and Anonymous Artist* (OtSt 45; Leiden: Brill, 2001).

⁶ Holladay may be too confident in venturing that “Ezek 34:1–16 ... is evidently an expansion of Jer 23:1–4”: Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 83.

⁷ For critical discussion of this issue, see R. R. Wilson, “Historicizing the Prophets: History and Literature in the Book of Jeremiah,” in S. L. Cook and S. C. Winter, eds., *On the Way to Nineveh: Studies in Honor of George M. Landes* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999), 136–54; C. L. Crouch, *An Introduction to the Study of Jeremiah* (T&T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 2–9; Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 3–6.

⁸ Affinities with the ordeal described in Num 5:11–31 are noted by M. Greenberg in his commentary, *Ezekiel* (Anchor Bible, 22; New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1:78), but the similarity

developed it in a significant way.⁹ Some other similarities may well be explained that way; this could involve dependence on written material or just oral influence.¹⁰ On such a model (which does indeed seem to me plausible, if insufficient) we could speak of finding within Ezekiel, to borrow a phrase from Austin Farrer, a “rebirth of images” from Jeremiah.¹¹

The issue is more complicated than this, however, especially if we think of the developed works. Christopher Seitz writes: “The final form of the Book of Jeremiah reflects significant redactional intervention carried out under the influence of Ezekiel traditions,”¹² and Terence Collins comments: “In terms of the production of the books there is no doubt that Ezekiel in fact preceded Jeremiah, which has a very lengthy and complicated redactional history behind it.”¹³ Overall, the probability is that there has been mutual influence between Jeremiah and Ezekiel.¹⁴

of imagery between Jeremiah and Ezekiel is significantly closer. This is not to say that the distinctive theological use to which the image is put in Ezekiel should not be closely interrogated, in which connection see M. S. Odell, *Ezekiel* (Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2005), 44.

⁹ The significance of the motif in Ezekiel is explored at length in E. F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel’s Prophecy* (Bible and Literature series, 21; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series, 78; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Holladay even speculates that Ezekiel heard Jeremiah preaching in Jerusalem specifically in the period 601/600 BCE: Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 84. See the judicious discussion of Rom-Shiloni, “Ezekiel and Jeremiah.”

¹¹ A. Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St John’s Apocalypse* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949).

¹² C. R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (BZAW 176; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1989), 295.

¹³ T. Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah: The Redaction Criticism of the Prophetic Books* (The Biblical Seminar 20; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 8.

¹⁴ My discussion of material in Jeremiah and Ezekiel that seems related is presented in diachronic mode, in terms of possible dependence and allusion (on which approach, see further M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). But we could come at this matter rather in terms of intertextuality, in a thoroughgoing synchronic sense (Cf. G. D. Miller, “Intertextuality in Old Testament Research,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 9 [2011]: 283–309). As we have acknowledged, some proper agnosticism about diachronic conclusions is appropriate; such agnosticism might itself justify a synchronic approach or one could defend a synchronic approach on its own literary terms. Both diachronic and synchronic surveys could be conducted

Images of Exile in Jeremiah and Ezekiel

To focus now on some specifics relating to our theme of images of exile in particular, a preliminary word is in order about the discussion of imagery. We have some good models to follow. Writing of the language and imagery of the Bible, George Caird presented a rich and subtle exploration of biblical language in the light of the study of semantics,¹⁵ while John Gibson focused specifically on the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible in his exploration of the use of language and imagery.¹⁶ We should not think simplistically of theological or other content being packaged in an image, as though it were a shell. Rather, the relationship between content and image is always a more subtle one, as Janet Soskice demonstrates clearly.¹⁷

Jeremiah and Ezekiel are in many ways similar on the central themes of exile. The two books are largely united in their theology of judgement and in this they stand on the shoulders of the eighth century Prophets and their response to the Assyrian crisis. The Assyrian and Babylonian crises were crucial catalysts for the religious thinking of ancient Israel. Deeply troubling events (such as the looming shadow and then the reality of imperial conquest) demanded explanation, essential if some structure of meaning were to be sustained. The violent and bloody attack of the foreign invader does not represent chaos or the triumph of other gods, it was claimed, but the just and powerful action of Israel's own God, punishing the nation's sins. There are, to be sure, significant differences between Jeremiah and Ezekiel in this area, for example relating to the presentation of sin (Ezekiel being more purity-focused, e.g. Ezek 22:26;

and each might yield valuable and complementary insights.

¹⁵ G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1980).

¹⁶ J. C. L. Gibson, *Language and Imagery in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1998).

¹⁷ J. M. Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); see also J. M. Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

44:23) and to how Babylon features (Jeremiah being represented as aligning himself more overtly with Babylon as the agent of divine punishment, e.g. Jer 27:12–15, in a book that nonetheless also contains, unlike Ezekiel, explicit oracles against Babylon, in Jeremiah 50–51). Even so, there is here a largely common theological basis to these two traditions.¹⁸

As for the images employed, the deity is modelled as a just authority figure who is very angry. Though we might sometimes forget it, even this is metaphorical. In a time of national crisis these prophets projected anger onto the national deity, a strategy that appeared to provide an explanation of national disaster more satisfactory than the victory of other gods or indeed the advent of meaningless chaos. This is a discourse widely evidenced in both prophetic books. For example, Jer 21:5 “I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and mighty arm, in anger, in fury, and in great wrath,” and Ezek 5:13 “My anger shall spend itself, and I will vent my fury on them and satisfy myself; and they shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken in my jealousy, when I spend my fury on them.”

Such language is found also in some other Prophets of the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Isaiah 10:5). But a feature more specific to Jeremiah and Ezekiel is their privileging of the exiles (in contrast to the community back in the land) and their presentation of Babylonia as the location where the future of the nation lay.¹⁹ Jeremiah uses very metaphorical language to highlight this. We read in Jer 24:5–8 “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: ‘Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I have sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans ...’ But thus says the LORD: ‘Like the bad figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten, so will I treat King Zedekiah of Judah, his officials, the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this

¹⁸ Cf. P. D. Miller, Jr., *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis* (SBL Monograph Series 27; Chico, CA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1982).

¹⁹ Rom-Shiloni explores very effectively the complex polarities and also affinities between the two communities: D. Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts between the Exiles and the People who Remained (6th–5th Centuries BCE)* (LHBOTS 543; New York and London: T&T Clark, 2013).

land, and those who live in the land of Egypt”’. On this occasion, uncharacteristically, the presentation in Ezekiel is in part more literal and prosaic. We read in Ezek 33:24–25 “Mortal, the inhabitants of these waste places in the land of Israel keep saying, ‘Abraham was only one man, yet he got possession of the land; but we are many; the land is surely given us to possess.’ Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: You eat flesh with the blood, and lift up your eyes to your idols, and shed blood; shall you then possess the land?’” We note related language in Ezek 11:15: “Mortal, your kinsfolk, your own kin, your fellow exiles, the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those of whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, ‘They have gone far from the LORD; to us this land is given for a possession’”, after which comes the remarkable verse 16, “Therefore say: Thus says the Lord God: ‘Though I removed them far away among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a little while in the countries where they have gone.’”²⁰

The two books present the judgement in gendered sexual and marital metaphorical language. Jeremiah 2:2 recalls “I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride.” But as early as verse 20 comes the lament “On every high hill and under every green tree you sprawled and played the whore.” And in Ezekiel 16 is found a similar narrative sequence. In verse 8 we read “‘I passed by you again and looked on you; you were at the age for love. I spread the edge of my cloak over you, and covered your nakedness: I pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘and you became mine.’” And yet by verse 15 the picture has changed: “You trusted in your beauty, and played the whore because of your fame, and lavished your whorings on any passer-by.” In both books judgement that is presented as fitting follows. For example, Ezek 16:37: “Therefore, I will gather all your lovers, with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated; I will gather them against you from all around, and will uncover your nakedness to them, so that they may see all your

²⁰ On the language of Ezek 11:16, see further P. M. Joyce, “Dislocation and Adaptation in the Exilic Age and After”, in J. Barton and D. J. Reimer, eds., *After the Exile: Essays in Honour of Rex Mason* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 45–58.

nakedness.”

Both books feature also the motif of Israel and Judah as two wayward sisters. In Jer 3:6–8 we read: “The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and played the whore there? And I thought, ‘After she has done all this she will return to me’; but she did not return, and her false sister Judah saw it. She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce; yet her false sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore.” Similarly in Ezek 23:2–4 we read “Mortal, there were two women, the daughters of one mother; they played the whore in Egypt; they played the whore in their youth; their breasts were caressed there, and their virgin bosoms were fondled. Oholah was the name of the elder and Oholibah the name of her sister. They became mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem.” We should set such gendered language in a long prophetic tradition, including in this case Hosea (e.g. Hos 2). Within this general tradition, the continuity between Jeremiah and Ezekiel seems nonetheless strong and yet Ezekiel also radicalizes the language to an extreme level.²¹ (See also the contributions of Martien Halvorsen-Taylor and Anja Klein on related themes in the present volume).

Significant too is shared language and imagery when looking to the future. J. W. Miller in 1955 showed that the number of significant points of contact between the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel is greater where the material concerns future hope and restoration from exile.²² We should not overlook here the fact that consideration of language about hope in the two books often involves debate about the secondary, redactional nature of the material involved. Indeed we may say that in general the greatest commonality between the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel is

²¹ S. Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²² J. W. Miller, *Das Verhältnis Jeremias und Hesekiels* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1955).

found in material that is both concerned with restoration and also likely to be secondary.

To illustrate the affinities with regard to future hope, two texts in Ezekiel, employing strongly metaphorical language, may be highlighted. In Ezek 11:19–20, we read “I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God”, and 36:26–27 “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.” A number of passages in the book of Jeremiah exhibit significant similarities to these verses of Ezekiel. Of these, the three most striking are found in Jeremiah chapters 24, 31 and 32. In Jer 24:7 we read “I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.” In Jer 31:31–3 we read: “The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” And finally in Jer 32:38–40 we read “They shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for all time, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them, never to draw back from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, so that they may not turn from me.”

Von Rad regarded these parallels as so significant that he wrote: “one feels that Ezekiel

must somehow have had Jeremiah's prophecies in front of him."²³ We cannot, however, overlook the fact that these three passages in Jeremiah that bear the closest resemblance to Ezek 11:19–20 and 36:26–27 are among those Jeremianic prose passages in which deuteronomistic influence seems most apparent. It is likely that deuteronomistic influence played a part, in different degrees, both in the formation of the two prophets and in the development of their thought and style, both at the primary level and in the redactional development of their work. This is a complex and long-term phenomenon, one whose consideration should be set also within the context of the redaction of the prophetic corpus as a whole and indeed of reflection upon canonical process.²⁴

Reflection on the restoration images shared by Jeremiah and Ezekiel is instructive in its own right, but it is also relevant because the models presented for restoration after exile typically carry implications about how the exilic situation is perceived and presented, since both books characteristically feature a pattern of recapitulation. For example, the restoration oracles cited above clearly reverse a situation marked by hardness of heart and by failure to follow the statutes and ordinances and to keep the covenant—in short by failure to be the people of YHWH. A couple of other recapitulations found in the two books (with Ezekiel generally markedly more systematic and stylized) may be cited, by way of example. One is that whereby desolation and despoilation (e.g. Jer 4:7, “A lion has gone up from its thicket, a destroyer of nations has set out; he has gone out from his place to make your land a waste; your cities will be ruins without inhabitant”; Ezek 6:6, “Wherever you live, your towns shall be waste and your high places ruined, so that your altars will be waste and ruined, your idols broken and destroyed, your incense-stands cut down, and your works wiped out”) is turned to rebuilding and blossoming (Jer

²³ G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), 235.

²⁴ Cf. Collins, *Mantle of Elijah*; B.S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress; London: SCM, 1979); J. A. Sanders, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); R. E. Clements, *Old Testament Prophecy: From Oracles to Canon* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

31:27–28 “‘The days are surely coming,’ says the LORD, ‘when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,’ says the LORD”; Ezek 36:8–10: “But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot out your branches, and yield your fruit to my people Israel; for they shall soon come home. See now, I am for you; I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown; and I will multiply your population, the whole house of Israel, all of it; the towns shall be inhabited and the waste places rebuilt”). And another recapitulation is that whereby kings are first condemned (e.g. Jer 22:18–19: “Therefore thus says the LORD concerning King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah: They shall not lament for him, saying, ‘Alas, my brother!’ or ‘Alas, sister!’ They shall not lament for him, saying, ‘Alas, lord!’ or ‘Alas, his majesty!’ With the burial of a donkey he shall be buried—dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem”; Ezek 7:27: “The king shall mourn, the prince shall be wrapped in despair, and the hands of the people of the land shall tremble. According to their way I will deal with them; according to their own judgements I will judge them. And they shall know that I am the LORD”) and then hopes of royal restoration are presented (Jer 23:5–6: “The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness’”; Ezek 34:23–24: “I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.”)²⁵

²⁵ Cf. T. M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

Marked differences between Jeremiah and Ezekiel when using the same image

We can attempt to distinguish between common cultural stock, general prophetic tradition, and more idiosyncratic features shared by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. But there are also ways in which Jeremiah and Ezekiel diverge in striking ways even while appearing to share language in common. Three cases may illustrate this phenomenon.

(i) Dry Bones

Both books feature grim scenes of dry bones, symbolizing judgement. In Jer 8:1–3 we read “At that time, says the LORD, the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of its officials, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be brought out of their tombs; and they shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and served, which they have followed, and which they have inquired of and worshipped; and they shall not be gathered or buried; they shall be like dung on the surface of the ground. Death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family in all the places where I have driven them, says the LORD of hosts.” In Ezek 37:1–2 we read “The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry.” Thus far an image very like that of Jeremiah 8. But then matters take a different turn. We read in verse 3 “He said to me, ‘Mortal, can these bones live?’ I answered, ‘O Lord GOD, you know.’ Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.’” When Ezekiel prophesies as commanded the bones indeed come together, and are covered with sinews, flesh and skin. Then in verse 9 we read: “He said to me, ‘Prophesy to the breath’”. Ezekiel does so and breath comes

into them. They stand on their feet, a vast multitude, which is then explained to be the whole house of Israel, restored.

While one can consider other antecedents,²⁶ it seems to me likely that Jeremiah 8 supplies the imaginative seed which in Ezekiel 37 is developed at great length and with a very different, positive turn.²⁷

(ii) *Sour Grapes*

This is a case in which it is too often assumed that Jeremiah and Ezekiel are saying the same thing. In Jer 31:29–30 we read: “In those days they shall no longer say: ‘The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge.” In Ezek 18:1–4 we read words that might seem to have a similar meaning: “The word of the LORD came to me: What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? As I live, says the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.”

As for the relative dating of these passages, there are clear indications that Jer 31:29–30 is secondary to Ezekiel 18.²⁸ But it is important that these sour grapes references in the two books, though often aligned, are very different in their meaning. Ezekiel’s renunciation of the saying that “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Ezek 18:2) amounts to a radical rejection of the saying of Exod 20:5–6 (“You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments”) and parallels. Ezekiel insists that the present generation is punished for its own sins and not for the sins of previous generations. Ezekiel’s is a statement of what is now the case. In sharp contrast to this, it

²⁶ Cf. B. Lang, “Street Theater, Raising the Dead, and the Zoroastrian Connection in Ezekiel’s Prophecy”, in J. Lust, ed., *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and their Interrelation* (BETL LXXIV; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1986), 297–316.

²⁷ Images of death and life are explored elsewhere in this volume by Francis Landy and Lena Tiemeyer.

²⁸ Holladay summarizes the evidence: Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 163–4.

is important that the words of Jeremiah 31 are cast as future hope. Jeremiah 31:27 opens “The days are surely coming ...” and verse 29 follows on “In those days ...” This is a notable example of the complex way that eschatological hopes may affirm an aspiration for the future and yet may also work to reinforce the understanding of the present as distinct from that future hope. And in this case Jeremiah, unlike Ezekiel, stands with the Deuteronomistic History, notably 2 Kgs 23:26 (see also Jer 15:4).

(iii) *Theological Geography*

I have in mind here the movement of peoples from one place to another in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It is easy perhaps to overlook the metaphorical dimension of journey language, but we know that exile and dispersion are about more than mere physical journeying.²⁹ We are dealing here with stylized language, metaphor writ large.

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel speak of journeying, but with different emphases. In characterizing the diversity of the Jeremiah and Ezekiel traditions here, I contrast (with, I trust, at least some heuristic value) Jeremiah as centrifugal (that is, moving outwards) with Ezekiel as ultimately centripetal (moving inwards). In speaking of Jeremiah as centrifugal I have in mind not least the so-called “letter to the exiles” in chapter 29 (on which Else Holt writes elsewhere in this volume). In Jer 29:5–7 we read “Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” This is quite possibly redactional,³⁰ but represents an aspect of the Jeremiah tradition that acknowledges in a pragmatic and descriptive way the extent and nature of the dispersion of the people. A more complex case

²⁹ P. R. Davies, “Exile? What Exile? Whose Exile?,” in Lester L. Grabbe, ed., *Leading Captivity Captive: ‘The Exile’ as History and Ideology* (JSOT Supplement Series 278; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 128–38.

³⁰ Cf. H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans / London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1982), 306–7.

is the settlement in Egypt.³¹ In Jeremiah 42 the Prophet summons Johanan son of Kareah and all the people and reports the divine will. In verse 10 we read “If you will only remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down.” The alternative is enunciated in verses 15–16: “If you are determined to enter Egypt and go to settle there, then the sword that you fear shall overtake you there.” The message is clear: “O remnant of Judah, do not go to Egypt” (Jer 42:19). And yet in Jeremiah 43 it is reported that Johanan son of Kareah and the commanders took all the remnant of Judah, including Jeremiah, to Egypt. This is clearly not what was meant to happen. And yet, despite the obvious complexities (the motifs of divine disapproval and prophetic reluctance), the book of Jeremiah hereby acknowledges ongoing existence outside the land of Israel; again, pragmatic and realistic.

In Ezekiel, on the other hand, again despite some complexities (such as the appearance of YHWH on a moving throne in Babylonia in chapter 1 and the statement of Ezek 11:16 that the deity will be “a sanctuary to them for a little while in the countries where they have gone”), there is the ultimate orientation to a Jerusalem-focused future (Ezekiel 40–48). This is expressed above all in the overarching narrative of the journey of the deity away from and back to Jerusalem (Cf. Ezek 11:22–23; 43:1–7; the journeying of the deity is discussed by Jesper Høgenhaven elsewhere in the present volume).³² The metaphorical nature of journeying language is well highlighted, I suggest, by the fact that it is possible to speak, as here, of a god journeying. Ezekiel is in all this (true to form) more stylized and more prescriptive than Jeremiah, exemplifying what I have called a centrifugal trend.

In each of these three cases, then, we may speak of the two books sharing language and imagery and yet taking them in very different directions.

³¹ On which Ronnie Goldstein writes elsewhere in the present volume.

³² On “Theological Geography” in Ezekiel, see further Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 30–32.

Closing Reflections

Finally, two reflections of a different kind.

(a) I cannot finish without acknowledging that in the ancient world (as indeed in our day) the human realities of exile and dispersion involved rape, cannibalism, trauma and all the terrible features of warfare. Reference was made earlier to the shared metaphor of the judging divine agent. The Prophets' projection of anger onto the national deity was a strategy that appeared to provide an explanation of national disaster at a time when all familiar frames of reference were falling away. I have profound respect for human beings *in extremis* seeking meaning in such a time of the loss of all things. Nonetheless, there are dark themes close to hand here. Some of the implications of modelling the deity as an angry authority figure call for ethical critique, which will often be informed also by insights gleaned from feminist criticism. We have learned much from tragic reports about how the abused can find comfort in a relationship in which they are tortured by a more powerful person. Such relationships are sustained for complex reasons. Though I stand myself within a scriptural tradition of which this language of the Prophets is a part, I believe we should not be closed to the insight that when traumatized peoples interpret their sufferings as just punishment by their father-figure gods they may be in part replicating perennial dysfunctional family situations.³³

(b) A marked feature of the past twenty years in Biblical Studies is the attention given to the reception of the Bible over the centuries since ancient times. Much reception work celebrates the very diversity of usage, indeed there is often something of an "anything goes" spirit. There is also a place, however, for an ethical, indeed a political, critique of the use and impact of the Bible. I am not thinking here of Nazi or Apartheid uses of the Bible, important themes though those are, but of a matter closer to home. Our world today is dominated by the issues of mass

³³ J. M. O'Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor: Theology and Ideology in the Prophets* (Louisville, KY., and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

migration. There is debate about the extent to which the biblical legacy remains formative in diaspora discourse today; with Robin Cohen³⁴ and others, I am of the view that biblical influence is extensive here. A prominent feature of this is the lingering effect of the widespread biblical idea of exile as deserved punishment, found not only in Prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel, but also in the Deuteronomistic History (e.g. 2 Kings 14; 24–25) and in Torah texts such as Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Moralistic language relating to migration persists to this day—the often implicit notion of displacement as somehow deserved. This is in serious ways a toxic legacy, not least in our own time, when it is often found alongside deep tendencies to xenophobia and racism, whether the migrants in question are Syrian or Mexican. As experts on the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament, critical custodians of this great text, I suggest that biblical scholars have a responsibility to help our contemporaries understand the roots of moralistic interpretations of exile, migration and dispersion, explaining that such ideas—at least in their biblical form—began not in the pointing of fingers at others but in the human reality of people such as the sixth-century Judahites desperately trying to make sense of *their own* tragic experiences in the light of their religious faith in a powerful and just God, clinging onto a sense of meaning at a time of the loss of all things.

³⁴ R. Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (2nd edn; London: Routledge, 2008).